

AIRGRAM

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HANDLING INDICATOR

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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FROM : AmEmbassy COPENHAGEN

DATE: November 7, 1962

SUBJECT: Scandinavian Journalists Report on Condition in Cuba.

REF :

Both Social Democratic AKTUELT and Radical Liberal POLITIKEN featured reports from correspondents in Cuba in their November 1 issues. The AKTUELT article was written by Jørgen E. Petersen, staff writer on Social Democratic Aarhus DEMOKRATEN and one of the five Scandinavian journalists then under house arrest in a Habana hotel. It was smuggled out by two Swedish journalists, Lars Henrik Ottosen and Lars Hjelm, when they were released by Cuban authorities and sent back to Sweden by way of Prague and Copenhagen. According to subsequent press reports Petersen has been released and been given permission to work as a foreign correspondent. He was arrested despite the fact that he carried a letter of introduction from Cuban Charge d'Affaires in Copenhagen, Gabriel Calaforra Salas to the Cuban Foreign Ministry.

The POLITIKEN article was written by Sven Øste, correspondent of Swedish Liberal DAGENS NYHETER which has an exchange agreement with POLITIKEN. Øste was also under house arrest in the same hotel with Petersen.

There follow informal translations of two articles both of which are entitled "Report from Cuba".

I. (Jørgen E. Petersen)

Cuba is today caught in the net which Cubans themselves have helped to spread. It is feared that the two protagonists in the Cuban crisis, the United States and the Soviet Union, will decide its outcome without regard for Cuba. U Thant's arrival today at 1:00 p.m. and the role of the UN have thus assumed far greater importance than has previously been the case.

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The crisis in Cuba has resulted in Cuban popular support for Castro. There is no doubt that if a UN-supervised election were held in Cuba today Castro would receive an overwhelming majority. The question, however, remains as to how long this support will last. The crisis has given Castro an opportunity to regain prestige which he lost through failures on the economic front. He has declared Cuba to be on the verge of war and has armed so many Cuban men and women that from my pink palace I have the impression that there are today more armed than unarmed Cubans. By giving arms to the people they have received the impression that they are participants in the defense of their native country against American invasion. It has made them forget that food is scarce and that the previously happy Cuba has changed face.

The menu in the luxurious restaurant consisted of a cup of non-descript soup, boiled rice and coffee. While ancient Rome relied on "bread and circuses" the Cubans have to be content with only the latter. For the time being, however, nationalistic enthusiasm seems sufficient for the Cubans. The waiter who talks of beef steaks and roast chickens does so with a smile. He believes the shortages to be only a transitory phenomenon.

The Cubans believe in nationalist ardor, at least during the day, and in the colored posters which proclaim "Fatherland or Death", "Death to the Invaders" and "Cuba Does Not Stand Alone". No one listens however to the demagogic appeals interrupting the radio programs. At night the people dance the rumba where American tourists previously scattered dollars. It is as if the objectives of the revolution and the warlike atmosphere recede into the background with darkness. A negro orchestra plays in the hotel's red dining hall and young girls dance sexy dances. On the red wallpaper below the orchestra a large poster proclaims, "To Arms, To Arms" but in the low light from the chandelier it is as if no one sees it.

It seems gradually to be dawning on the Cubans that the text of the poster "Cuba is Not Alone" is untrue. The view is gaining ground among politically initiated that Cuba's new friends are abandoning her in the game of Great Power politics. This is a fact that U Thant's visit may serve to obscure but not entirely erase. It is of course difficult from my incarceration to form more than a partial picture of the political and psychological factors at work. Nevertheless, the fact that journalists arriving with letters of introduction from Cuban legations are being arrested indicates that there must be something that the regime does not wish to have discovered. Otherwise there would be no reason for the imprisonment of British, Canadian and Swedish journalists as well as your correspondent. Through the intervention of their Ambassadors the prisoners are gradually being released. The fact that I carried a letter of introduction from the Cuban legation describing me as an objective journalist was irrelevant. Had the Swedish Ambassador, Gunnar Dyrssen, not appeared at the airport to meet the Swedish journalists and taken me under his protection I would probably have been incarcerated in a real prison.

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As it was I was interned in the "Hotel Capri" on the Ambassador's and my word of honor that I would not attempt to leave the hotel. I was not given an opportunity to deliver my credentials and when I mentioned them in a telephone conversation with a Cuban Foreign Ministry official he said they were unimportant.

From my imprisonment in the hotel I have observed that all persons in Cuba are "comrades". There appears to be no class distinction. Another side of the case, however, is that it is grotesque to see young girls and stately matrons dressed in battle dress in surroundings reminiscent of layer cake. I feel that developments are resulting in this nation of six million kind and charming people having to pay for a crisis that was created by and for the Great Powers. I am afraid that the atmosphere that has been created as the result of the crisis in order to make up internally for the losses sustained externally will have the effect of leading the Cuban revolution in a demagogic direction. The revolutionary idealists will bitterly repent this development later.

There is little doubt that the mundane existence in Cuba will show 1962 to have been economically a bad year. It will be even worse than 1961 which was the economic nadir in the post-revolutionary period.

To date the average Cuban has not discovered that his leaders do not know the position their country occupies as regards the Cuban crisis. It will probably take some time before the situation is fully understood and when this occurs will it then be sufficient that Cuba has received a guarantee against invasion? I do not believe so! These people are too Latin American and charming in their temperament to accept any East-European theses thrust upon them.

There can be no mistake that the fear of invasion is genuine. The enthusiastic Cuban is truly afraid that the revolution's prospects for a hitherto unknown self-respect and re-awakening of proud Spanish traditions will be lost in a military attack. The fear of the United States receives expression in the fact that at the present time Cuba desires no other friends than those from Eastern Europe. The girl at the hotel asked me, "Are you Russian or Czechoslovakian?" She did not know what a Scandinavian was. A sympathy for a system they have no possibility of evaluating is being forced upon the Cuban people.

II. (Sven Öste)

Disappointment with the Soviet attitude is clearly discernible in Habana. Even if our freedom of movement is limited we have been able to observe from our hotel that posters with the promises, "The Soviet Union Supports Us - We Are Not Alone" are being torn down from the walls. There is also a change of tone in the press. Leading articles have suddenly become silent about the recently idolized Nikita Khrushchev. Newspapers are once again engaged in building up Fidel Castro. For several days the press had not mentioned Castro when his actions clearly indicated how dependent he was on the directives from Moscow. Then the iron ring of

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the blockade descended on Cuba it took two days before Castro appeared in public. He was then unable to refer to any promises of support from Moscow. After his radio talk last Tuesday silence descended on the bearded hero who in previous crises had appeared on television and at mass meetings almost every evening. It was not until yesterday that a campaign was re-initiated to glorify the leader. Today's paper states in banner headlines that Castro will address the populace on Thursday evening. It is not easy to speculate as to what he will say. His previously much repeated assurances that Cuba and its allies were ready to carry the struggle to the mainland of the American continent should this be necessary are not compatible with Khrushchev's promise to dismantle the missile bases in Cuba.

Even for one who has been confined to house arrest and thus had his view limited to the streets around the hotel this has been exemplified by the sight of men pulling down quotations from previous speeches from the walls and replacing them with other less belligerent statements. The effects of this development are unmistakably clear. Many of the leaders of the revolution must now regard the Soviet Union as a protector who has failed Cuba. This is true although they may be forced to admit that the crisis has assured the existence of the Cuban Government as the United States will have to abandon all forms of support to the forces who wish to overthrow Castro. In Cuba the balance between the old communists on the one hand and the "Fidelistas" on the other hand will be watched with anticipation. The "Fidelistas" who have been called the new communists by some American observers include the men around the chief of government who, together with him six years ago, initiated the struggle against the Batista dictatorship. Together with the communists they form the large party of unity, ORI. Within the leadership however there continues to be strong rivalry between the two groups for power. A serious crisis became apparent in March when Castro openly accused ORI's communist Secretary General Anibal Escalante of being ambitious, unscrupulous and intriguing. The defeat was total for Escalante and he went into exile in the Soviet Bloc. The communists lost several leading positions in local party organizations after the purge of "Anibalists". There was also a marked cooling in relations with the Soviet Union and the Soviet Ambassador in Habana was suddenly recalled.

At the same time it became apparent that the serious economic situation required aid from abroad. The Soviet Union appeared to offer the only succor. New negotiations were consequently entered into with Moscow and the Cubans were promised support in the form of food, more technicians and modern weapons, which apparently also included missile bases. It is clear that Soviet aid strengthened the old communists.

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